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Merit Systems Protection Board Finds That Applying for Federal Jobs Is Simple, Getting Feedback Is Not

A new U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board report finds that 62 percent of new, competitively-hired employees in fiscal year 1997 found that it was easy to apply for Federal jobs and that the Federal job announcements they responded to provided enough information to enable them to decide if they were interested in the job (67 percent) and qualified for it (75 percent). The MSPB report, "Competing for Federal Jobs: Job Search Experiences of New Hires," also notes, however, that the lack of feedback on the status of an application after it was submitted was a common complaint. In FY 1994 -1998, the Federal Government hired over 100,000 new, full-time permanent employees through the competitive hiring process.

"These findings reflect the progress agencies have made in simplifying the application process," MSPB Chairman Ben L. Erdreich said. "Paying attention to such procedures is important if the Government wants to avoid discouraging highly qualified applicants at a time when competition for them is as intense as it is in today's labor market."

Improvements in the application process are the result of many factors. For instance, to speed up hiring, the Government now allows Federal agencies to do their own advertising, examining, and candidate referral rather than obtaining these services from the Office of Personnel Management which formerly maintained central registers of candidates. There is also a single electronic data base, USAJobs, which applicants can access by computer or telephone to obtain

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Governmentwide vacancy and job qualifications information. Results from the MSPB survey suggest that these changes are paying off. A majority of the new employees surveyed (58 percent) said that hiring decisions were made within a reasonable period of time. And of those who used the internet to search for jobs, 77 percent said it was easy for them to find out about Federal jobs in this way.

But Chairman Erdreich cautioned agencies not to let this good news make them complacent. “Although our data suggest that agencies are doing a good job in managing competitive examining, there is room for improvement in customer service,” he said, citing survey findings indicating that even respondents who were successful in obtaining Federal jobs encountered difficulties during their job search. The most common problems reported were not receiving timely feedback or receiving no feedback at all, having to supply too much information at the beginning of the application process, and receiving poor service from the examining office staff.

The Board is an independent, quasi-judicial agency with responsibility for deciding Federal employee appeals from personnel actions taken against them. As part of its mission, the Board is responsible for conducting studies of the civil service and other Federal merit systems and for reviewing the significant actions of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

To request copies of the report, send an e-mail to studies@mspb.gov or call (202) 653-6772, extension 1350. You may also write to the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, 1120 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20419, to obtain a hard copy, or you may download the report from the Board’s web site, <http://www.mspb.gov>.